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ABSTRACT

Children in Africa starve to death or fail to thrive and achieve their full potential as a result of social problems that have their roots in both national and international issues. In many African countries, parents are unable to feed their children because farmers no longer grow enough food and prefer to cultivate cash crops that are exported to foreign countries to service debts to rich industrial nations. This paper recommends a multilevel and integrated approach to defining and solving the problem of child survival and child development in Africa. The following issues are explored: (1) the development of an agenda for dealing with the fundamental issue of Africa's underdevelopment that is in the best interest of Africans and their children; (2) the promotion of child welfare through the empowerment of families and communities; (3) the use of the African concepts of childhood and socialization, and the strong emotions and expectations that Africans have for their children, as the bases for any campaigns or programs for promoting child welfare and development; (4) the empowerment of Africans by means of technical information; and (5) the creation of public awareness in Africa, as a result of which the general public, communities that are at risk, and various other national and international groups will become informed about the issues and problems of child survival and child development in Africa. (SM)

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Child survival and child development in Africa

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Editorial history

This paper was originally commissioned by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to be presented at a Regional Seminar, staged in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Lesotho, in Maseru, Lesotho on 25-30 November, 1991. The seminar, entitled 'Child Development in Africa: Building on People's Strengths' brought together some fifty people representing early childhood development programmes in Africa, as well as academics, policy makers and representatives of international, governmental and non-governmental organisations concerned with the care and education of young children. A publication summarising the outcomes of the seminar will be published separately by the Foundation.

About the author

Ibi Agiobu-Kemmer was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, and also a doctorate in Child Development from the University of St Andrews, Scotland in the United Kingdom. She has taught courses on human development for several years at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Her research interests focus mainly on work with children of rural and disadvantaged families. More recently, she has become interested in the impact of the new information technology on children growing up in complex societies. Ibi Agiobu-Kemmer is the proud mother of two young children.

Bernard van Leer Foundation

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CHILD SURVIVAL AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

The image question

The television screens in Britain and other Western countries are frequently filled with images of the crisis situation in Africa. Millions of children are shown starving to death in the arms of their parents, dirty and covered with flies. Some of the pictures are dramatic and they achieve the desired effect of mobilising the public to give funds. Such funds provide a lifeline to these victims of famine and civil war in the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Mozambique, Malawi, and Liberia. The problem is further complicated in the East African countries by the discovery that some children are suffering from AIDS.

There are some who argue that Western journalists do not give a balanced view of events in the African continent. They claim, for example, that development projects and self-help efforts usually go unreported because they are not considered sensational enough to be newsworthy. However, pictures surely do not lie? The image that Africa presents to the world is that of a child reduced to a living skeleton – sunken eyes, thin legs, a protruding stomach – who is begging for food.

The majority of Africans do not see the ugly pictures of themselves that appear on Western television screens. Therefore it is possible that many are not aware of the extent of the problem nor its gravity. If they saw themselves in this bad light on a daily basis, would Africans not be motivated to take urgent action towards solving their own problems? We appeal to the pride of a people. No matter how poor they are, many Africans like to come out in their best attire. They like to look good in the eyes of the world.

The image question is one that I find relevant to the problem of child survival and child development in Africa. Communications systems on the continent are either very limited or sometimes non-existent. Where they do exist, African journalists understandably prefer to focus on more attractive topics. Consequently, many within the continent itself, including the urban elite, are not tuned into the seriousness of the situation, nor can they perceive its global dimensions. Widespread and adequate information will mobilise Africans themselves to seek solutions to their own problems.

Defining the problem

The problems of child survival and child development are symptoms of an underlying disease. The real illness is Africa's under-development. Children in Africa starve to death or fail to thrive and achieve their full potential because of social problems which have their roots in both national and international issues. In many African countries, for example, parents cannot afford to feed their children. The reason for this is that farmers in these countries, (for example Ghana, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and others), are no longer growing food crops as much as they used to. Nowadays they prefer to cultivate cash crops such as tobacco, tea, coffee, cocoa, or cotton which are exported to foreign countries. Their national governments are encouraging this export drive because foreign exchange is needed to service debts which they owe to the rich industrialised nations. Similarly in those

countries in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere that are experiencing famine and growing desertification, rather than giving priority to the development of appropriate agricultural techniques which would control the disaster, governments prefer to invest borrowed loans on projects that benefit only the leaders themselves or a few selfish interests. They cooperate with the multinationals without regard for the welfare of the majority of their peoples.

Multi-level approach to problem definition

These various factors combine at different levels to affect children and their life chances. In defining the problem of child survival and child development we need to take a multi-level approach. Such an approach may be represented by concentric spheres of increasingly wider influence, surrounding the child at the centre. In this conceptualisation the family is the closest sphere of influence on the child. Families are in turn affected by events in their communities, and in Africa these are organised under local government, regions or states. The resources available to local government for community development are determined, to a large extent, by the policies made at the next wider sphere, that is the national level. The widest sphere of influence is the international community.

Integrated approach to problem solution

Furthermore, in this representation each level comprises several dimensions, all of which must be taken into account in the search for effective solutions. This is the integrated approach. Thus the child, for example, comprises various aspects such as the cognitive, social, moral, physical, emotional and self-concept, all of which we must attend to in an integrated approach to his or her welfare and development. Similarly there are different dimensions of family life which interact to affect the child. These include food security, health and hygiene, family structure and socio-economic status, housing/shelter and personal space.

On the other hand, communities are organised according to age groups, clans, castes, and craft organisations. The child's destiny and fortunes throughout life depend upon the positions that his or her family occupies in these associations. The international community, nations and their regions are also composed of different organisations and agencies, ministries and departments. In the integrated approach to intervention, it is important that activities and efforts are coordinated among the various dimensions within a sphere of influence, as well as across the different levels. This will ensure that they do not work at cross purposes in the interest of the child, his or her family and community.

Do we have an agenda for Africa?

Do we have an agenda for dealing with the fundamental issue of Africa's under-development? Or have we only given ourselves a mandate to eradicate the symptoms while ignoring the disease? Symptoms continue to recur for as long as the illness which produces them remains untreated.

Aid agencies which plan to become dispensable and redundant in another 25 years must support programmes that are designed to tackle the fundamental issues of social change and social development as a context for child survival and child development in Africa. In today's world, it is only in those countries that are still struggling to develop that we have problems of child survival and child development, as indicated by high infant mortality, malnutrition, illiteracy, child labour and so on. Developed nations have drastically reduced or eliminated these conditions for their peoples.

Should not Africans and their governments pursue industrialisation so that they can fabricate their own machines rather than incur debts in order to import them? Should they not encourage the growth of small businesses and increase manufacturing activities, so that they will be in a stronger position to dictate the prices of their commodities on world markets? Will this not increase their wealth and provide the necessary finance for free education for all, free health care facilities and food supplements for children, rural electrification and clean water supply, increased food production and subsidies for farmers, good access roads, improved transportation and communication systems?

Africans want technological advancement and the benefits that this brings in terms of improved standards of living and economic independence. But are they prepared to pay the price? What is the price of industrialisation? Is it the loss of traditional values?

The Japanese have proved to the modern world that nations can still retain their cultural identities while pursuing the goals of industrialisation. What seems to characterise the culture of development is a willingness to pay the price of commitment to hard work, determination, delay of gratification, long-term planning, good leadership, national orientation and self-reliance.

What kind of development?

What kind of development is in the best interest of Africans and their children? In England recently, on an Open University programme on Third World development, I heard about two aid-supported projects both taking place in the same East African country – Tanzania.

In one of these OXFAM, an international aid agency, supports an income generating project for young men at a village near Arusha. The project has equipped the youths with building and carpentry skills, and they work together as a group on building assignments in their local community. They have built a house for the corn mill to help the village women; also a clinic and several houses for the local people. These houses are built to a high quality and very cheaply from locally available materials. The young men provide a useful service for their community and they themselves are not jobless. They meet regularly to discuss the progress of their work and any problems they might have. They keep accurate records and accounts; they share profits; and they are encouraged to save.

In this project the young men have been given skills for self-reliance. The creation of jobs for them in the rural area means that they do not have to migrate to the cities as so many other men have done.

Some two hundred miles away from Arusha the story is different. The cattle rearers at Hannang have had their lands taken over by a large-scale wheat growing scheme, sponsored by aid from Canada. The Hannang plains now look like the Canadian prairies – covered with wheat – and the pastoral people have nowhere to graze their cattle. They have been deprived of their livelihood and no alternatives have been provided. They migrate to the cities to become beggars and increase the population of urban slums.

Most Tanzanians cannot afford to buy the bread that is made from this wheat. Besides, the basic diet for Tanzanians is maize and not wheat. UNICEF reports indicate that about half the child population is malnourished. Their mothers leave them at home unattended for long periods because they are planting maize in the fields or spending long hours grinding it to flour at small local mills.

When the Canadians withdraw their support in a few years' time, the Tanzanians will have to pay dollars, which they cannot afford, in order to import tyres, spare

parts and machinery so that the project can continue. If no Tanzanians are being trained to repair the machines when they break down, as they are likely to do, the project may continue at great expense with borrowed loans from Canada or, alternatively, it may be abandoned. Who benefits then from this kind of aid and development project?

Promoting child survival and child development

The Bernard van Leer Foundation, in collaboration with its partners in Africa and elsewhere, recognises that the welfare of children can be promoted more effectively by empowering their families and communities. Thus in some countries the Foundation's early childhood care and education programmes are also linked with parent education and adult literacy campaigns, as well as the expansion of income generating activities. However, the thrust of the Foundation's work within the continent has been the establishment of pre-school centres which are community-based and low cost. These centres are mostly built in rural areas or urban slums which are deprived of the benefits of development, usually located several miles away at city centres.

It is possible to count the numbers of such pre-school centres which are being established in those countries where the Foundation supports projects, and also to count the number of children currently enrolled or targeted in the next few years. These statistics provide a sense of achievement and progress, similar to what we experience by counting the number of children immunised against the deadly childhood diseases.

However, if the expanded programme of immunisation has led to more African children surviving, as indicated by decreasing infant mortality, is the proliferation of pre-school centres the vaccine for promoting child development? If we suppose that it is, how then shall we measure its success? Is it by the number of vaccines given, that is, the number of pre-schools established and number of children enrolled? Or shall we see measurable achievements in the lives of these African children, as they grow from pre-school to mature adulthood, in communities whose developments have paralleled their own?

We also need to ask ourselves if there are still people around who believe that the best place for young children, especially the under-fives, to experience quality care and stimulation is within the home environment as opposed to pre-school centres. If that is the case, then perhaps some programme effort should be directed at helping parents to improve their living standards and the quality of care and educational experiences provided for children at home. This may be done through a home visiting programme which combines parent education, regular growth monitoring and assessment of the children's psychological development.

The April 1991 issue of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's Newsletter contains an interesting report from one of the projects it supports in South Africa. *Ntataise* is the name given to the project in the Orange Free State concerned with the early education of the children of rural farm workers. We are told that it is a South Sotho word meaning 'to lead a young child by the hand'. But to where or what are the children being led? I ask this question to raise the point about the need for us to examine what goals we are trying to achieve in the lives of the children. Do we have the same goals for the children as their parents have for them?

The mothers did not understand what project workers were doing with their children. They saw their children playing with adults who, they thought, would give their children a better preparation for adult life than they had themselves. The mothers do not know about the importance of play for the cognitive

development of young children. They also do not understand that it is through play that children learn the skills that are necessary for technological intelligence. These are concepts which we take for granted, but they are strange to parents who have never been to school or had any contact with the modern world.

In the experience of African parents, most of whom observe a traditional way of life, children are prepared for adult life by 'working' with their parents and other adults. Children learn skills for adult occupations by observing and participating in the relevant tasks with their parents. There is therefore a difference in method which African parents in rural South Africa and elsewhere in rural Africa do not understand. I suspect that they also do not understand about where we are taking their children. The education we are giving the children, through the methods that we use and the concepts that we teach, aims to develop them for a modern society. This is a world that African parents, about 80 per cent of whom live in rural areas, do not know. They educate their children for life in the world that they know by taking them through the necessary tasks and situations from a very early age.

Building upon African concepts of childhood and socialisation

Among various ethnic groups in Africa, which cut across national boundaries, the greatest misfortune that can befall a man or woman is to be childless. No matter how rich and successful the individual may be, life is miserable and unfulfilled without children. Children are the 'essence or sap of life'. According to a Yoruba folk song, they are considered to be 'clothing and adornment' for their parents. Anyone who does not have children has nothing to cover his shame and nakedness.

Parents want good and healthy children to 'adorn' them and give them status and respect in society. African parents invest in their children's welfare and education so that they grow up into responsible adulthood. It is their hope that these children will provide for them in their old age, give them a decent burial and continue the family's good name after they are dead. These desires and attitudes towards children exist among Africans of all walks of life including the educated urban elite. Family planning campaigns and the high cost of living brought about by structural adjustment programmes have led to a reduction in the number of children that some families plan to have. It is still rare, however, to find any couples who will decide not to have any children or make it a second or third priority of their relationship.

These strong emotions and expectations that Africans have with regard to their children provide a fertile ground for any campaigns or programmes for promoting child welfare and development. Rather than undermine or disregard their feelings and attitudes, can we not build upon these strong desires to do the best for their children? When we help parents by doing those tasks which they consider to be their primary responsibility, we confuse them and encourage them to develop an inferiority complex. This is obviously not our intention. What parents need from us is new information to strengthen the skills they already have as prime educators and custodians of their children.

While they may not be familiar with the Western concepts of child development which underlie the models of child care and early education which we bring to them, African mothers nonetheless do have knowledge about how to bring up children. Such knowledge is expressed in their belief systems and child rearing practices, some of which have helped many generations to survive up to the present time.

Are we interested in what mothers in the project communities know about children? How often do we ask for their opinions and ideas when planning and implementing programmes that will affect their lives and those of their children?

Some years ago, the literature in developmental psychology frequently contained reports on studies about a phenomenon referred to as 'African infant precocity'.[1] Researchers working in various parts of Africa found that African infants were developmentally more advanced when compared with Western children of the same age! Observational studies of African children indicated that some child rearing practices common among rural mothers may have been responsible for their children's developmental advantage. These practices include constant breastfeeding of the infant on demand, immediate attention to the infant's cries and other signals, frequent body contact and kinesthetic stimulation, social play, exposure to a variety of social environments, as well as early encouragement of locomotor and social skills.

When there is no famine, civil war, plague, or any other disaster, the traditional methods of child rearing observed by African mothers produce healthy and developmentally advanced children. This precocious development is not found in children of 'Westernised' parents.

One unnatural disaster that has befallen some babies is that the promotion of infant formula has discouraged their mothers from breastfeeding. Although this is more likely to happen among the urban population, some rural areas have also become the 'dumping grounds' for the baby food companies. Since most areas lack safe drinking water and mothers cannot read to follow instructions for mixing the formula, the babies are usually fed a variety of concoctions with the result that many suffer and die from diarrhoea and malnutrition.

The move towards modernisation and the involvement of women in formal employment has meant that many young children, including babies, are being deprived of their mothers' attention for long periods during the day. Children experience all sorts of day care arrangements while their mothers are at work. Some of these would qualify as situations of child abuse.

The researchers on 'African infant precocity' found that the phenomenon seemed to disappear somewhere around the children's second birthday. When African children were tested and compared with Western children their performance began to show a lag after two years of age. A number of reasons were probably responsible for this: the children were weaned around this age and subsequently had to compete with the rest of the family for whatever food was available; the arrival of a new sibling would mean that the child no longer had the mother's undivided attention.

Another contributing factor is that tests of psychological development become increasingly culture dependent for children of older ages. For example, while conducting a short-term longitudinal study in which I compared the performance of Nigerian and British infants[2] I found that the Nigerian children in my sample began to show a lag in their second year although they had performed better than the British infants when tested in their first year. The Nigerian children were not malnourished and none of them had a new sibling as yet. I noticed, however, that these children were having social experiences and participating in adult tasks. I reckoned that they must be developing skills which the tests, based as they were on Western cultures, were not designed to assess. In other words the children continued their precocious development after the age of two, but along dimensions that were not assessed by Western tests.

African parents in rural communities encourage their children to grow up very quickly. From the first year they encourage locomotor and social skills. Once children can move around they help their mothers by running errands about the

1. Super, C.M. (1976) 'Environmental Effects on Motor Development: The Case of African Infant Precocity' in Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology. 18, pp 561-567 and Super, C.M. (1981) 'Cross-cultural Research on Infancy' in Triandis, H.C. and Heron, A. (eds) Handbook of Cross-cultural Psychology: Development Psychology. Vol. 4. Boston: Allyn and Bacon

2. Agiobu-Kemmer, I.S. (1984) 'Cognitive and Affective Aspects of Infant Development' in Curran, V. (ed.) *Nigerian Children: Developmental Perspectives*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

house. Two year olds participate in housework tailored to their level. By the age of five, young children may be responsible for looking after their baby brothers or sisters while their mothers are away to the market or farm. Rural African parents do not prolong childhood as those of us in modern societies can afford to do. They encourage their children to demonstrate capacities which we underestimate in our own children. For example, among the Fulah of West Africa a boy is taught from a very early age how to manage a herd of cattle. He knows where to find the best pastures and how to deal with emergencies in the fields where he may be several kilometres away from home. In East Africa a young girl may be sent into the streets early in the morning to sell the fried doughnuts prepared by herself or her mother before she goes to school. These experiences are common to children in many parts of Africa. We often criticise it as child labour but from the point of view of the African parents, it is called responsibility training. It is their way of teaching their children how to survive and become economically self-sufficient adults in society. Hardly any child grows up to become jobless in this system.

The Fulah boy may not learn about inches and centimetres until several years later – if he goes to school. Yet he knows the distance between his village and surrounding villages, he knows how far away from home he can take the cattle so that he does not get lost. The East African girl also may not be doing too well in classroom arithmetic, but she knows enough 'street mathematics' to ensure that she gives the correct change to her customers every time. If anybody gets cheated in the transactions, it will not be her.

Some African parents resist sending their children to school because when children are enrolled in school they can no longer continue the traditions of their parents. To the Fulah people, cattle rearing is not just an occupation, it is a tradition, a way of life that is handed down from one generation to another. However, when parents are made to understand that education gives their children better prospects in a changing world, they are persuaded and many would sacrifice a great deal to invest in the education of their children. The problem these days is that educational qualifications do not seem to guarantee job prospects as they did in the past. Many university graduates and high school leavers roam the streets of African cities, still looking for employment several years after graduation. How do we convince parents, who want to pull their children out of school so that they can learn a 'useful' trade, that education is still important and relevant to their lives?

One Senegalese graduate who qualified as a lawyer but who now runs a bakery in Dakar, summed up his experience in the following words: 'Education broadens your mind but it does not teach you how to survive'.

Probably no one would argue with the proposition that it is a good thing that education broadens the mind, but should it not also teach our youth how to survive present day realities? Can we not build upon the traditional system's emphasis on early development of vocational and life skills? Is it not possible to incorporate culturally relevant experiences and traditions into the curriculum alongside the conventional subjects for all the levels of the school system?

The mothers of the *Ntataise* project in South Africa may not have found the pre-school so difficult to understand if they saw project workers helping their children to construct models of houses, trucks and familiar animals, or perhaps teaching them to make clay pots and pans. Children in pre-schools can learn how to wash clothes and plastic plates in the context of water play. Project workers can show children how to make simple graters from empty tins which are then used to grate cassava, sweet potatoes or any other familiar food. All these practical skills can be taught to children within the context of play. Natural objects and materials such as sand, clay, water, sticks, straw, seeds, bottle tops, empty packets and tins are easily available in most communities. Children need

to play with toys and objects which they can destroy and put together again in the process of playing with them. When we donate expensive toys to community pre-school centres in order to encourage cognitive stimulation of the children, mothers and project workers are afraid to allow the children to play with them because they do not want the toys to get spoilt. Children gain a lot from constructing their own toys using discarded packets, containers, tyres and so on. Many of us have been impressed by the model trucks, cars and aeroplanes which African children, especially in rural areas, construct on their own without much guidance from adults.

It is common in many African cities to find young boys and girls who have dropped out of primary school either engaged in petty trading or working as apprentices to a motor mechanic, panel beater, vulcaniser, tailor, dressmaker, hairdresser or chemist. Some of them are children of rural parents who have been sent to the city to live with relatives while receiving apprenticeship training. It is important for the children and their parents that they should learn a practical skill with which they can earn a living. Western education does not emphasise practical skills. Its emphasis is on intellectual skills which are acquired over a very long period before the individual is considered to be qualified to take a job. How do we help parents to plan for the long-term success of their children and encourage them to keep their children in school, when immediate survival needs demand that they and their children go out to work? Can we include small projects on agriculture and food processing, carpentry, crafts, soap making, dressmaking, building and construction, design and so on in the curricula of primary and secondary schools so that when African youths leave school, they will have intellectual capacities as well as practical skills with which to earn a living?

Beyond the pre-school

For many years our preoccupations were solely with the problem of child survival. Now that infant mortality rates are decreasing, we have just begun to ask what happens beyond child survival. Given our characteristic shortsightedness, our present focus on early childhood care, development and education might mean that we are not yet able to think of what happens to children beyond the pre-school years. Yet we know that children grow up quickly, especially when they are given food supplements and stimulating experiences such as they receive in our enrichment programmes. What becomes of these children beyond the pre-school?

The most successful development programmes are based upon long-term planning. This is as true for the business enterprise as it is for the national economy. It also applies in the area of human development. Do we have any plans for programmes or projects that will encourage the continued success of children's development after age six or eight? Why should we wait for another 25 years before we plan for the maturity, self-reliance and economic independence of today's under fives?

Dialogue is important

The importance of dialogue and regular discussions between members of the project team and the community it is trying to help cannot be over-emphasised. This point was made eloquently by Fr Gerard Pantin, Executive Director of Servol, in his keynote address at the Tenth International Seminar of the Bernard van Leer Foundation held in Jamaica in 1988[3]. He especially drew attention to the need for attentive listening, humility and an open-minded attitude in our discussions with these 'weak, ignorant, and illiterate' members of the grassroots.

3. Pantin, G. (1988) 'Keynote address' in Children and Community: progressing through partnership. Summary report and conclusions of the 10th International Seminar (Kingston, Jamaica). The Hague, The Netherlands: Bernard van Leer Foundation

I have found in my own experience working on projects in Nigeria, that regular discussions as part of programme strategy helps to clarify issues for both sides, promotes mutual understanding and facilitates better cooperation. Let me illustrate this with some examples.

Recently at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, we carried out a study in collaboration with Tufts University, USA to investigate the factors that influenced child growth and child development in disadvantaged communities.[4] During a preliminary data gathering phase, we obtained an interesting set of findings relating to how the mothers' food beliefs affected their feeding practices, with consequent effects on the nutritional status and cognitive development of their children. The majority of Yoruba mothers in our sample, especially in the rural areas, believed that children should not be given much meat in their diet because according to them this would encourage the children to steal. They were asked to demonstrate on a 'meat board', divided into one-inch squares, how much meat they thought was sufficient for a two-year-old during a meal. Mothers who believed that giving meat would cause children to steal demonstrated that they would give very little amounts to children. We found a positive correlation between this variable, the amount of meat, and the nutritional status of the children. Better nourished children also tended to have higher scores on the Bayley tests of mental development which we administered to all the children.

The amount of meat given to the child is further reduced by the seniority factor which governs food distribution within the Yoruba household. The father, as head of the household, receives the largest share of the meat and other foods. The remaining portions are shared by other members of the family according to their age. Being the youngest, the two-year-old is at the very bottom of this hierarchy and thus he or she receives only a tiny bit of meat. Unless the mother is particularly attentive to the child's needs, he or she may not get enough food to eat in a situation where a bowl of food is shared with older siblings.

During a subsequent intervention phase the project team directed efforts towards changing this negative food attitude. This was done through focus group discussions with the mothers in order to understand their views and the reasons for their actions, and nutrition education to inform them about the value of animal proteins for the development of young children. A small sample of mothers whose children were developmentally at risk were encouraged by community-based workers to improve the diet and amount of cognitive stimulation given to their children. These community-based workers were mothers from the same neighbourhood who had been employed and trained by the project for this purpose.

In our efforts to promote child survival and child development, it soon became clear that in a more subtle way we were also changing people's traditions, and sometimes their values. We wanted to encourage Yoruba mothers to increase the amount of animal proteins in their children's diet, but we did not want to undermine the moral training of their children in this domain. Through dialogue and regular discussion it was possible to separate the issues for the mothers. At this level, we were pursuing parent education in order to promote child welfare and development.

In another study, a baseline survey conducted in 1990 among the Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria by UNICEF Nigeria in collaboration with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, mothers were interviewed to obtain data that would guide programme planning. On inspecting the mothers' responses to questions on the household record form, we discovered what we thought were inaccuracies in the pattern of reported family relationships. Having come from different ethnic groups in southern Nigeria, we had little knowledge about Hausa-Fulani culture. However, the field workers who interviewed the

4. Agiobu-Kemmer, I.S., Aina, A. and Zeitlin, M. (1989) Child Development for the Computer Age. Report of findings from project supported by unicef New York and the Joint Nutrition and Support Programme (jnsp) of the Italian government

mothers in their own language were themselves Hausa, so we asked them a lot of questions and listened to their answers.

Through our discussions with the field workers we learned that when the 12-year-old Hausa-Fulani mother has her first child, she returns to her father's house to be looked after by her own mother for a while. Throughout their lives she is not expected to relate to her first son as a mother would to her child. Rather she regards him with respect as she would an older brother or husband. When we therefore ask such mothers to list family members and their relationship to them, they either do not mention their first sons or they are listed as having a different relationship.

How do we encourage Fulani mothers to demonstrate their love for their sons, in spite of cultural taboos, so that they do not grow up feeling inadequate in their emotional relationships? I know one Fulani young man, a university graduate, who though now married with his own children, still finds it difficult to accept that his mother never talks to him!

The role of information

What is shared between parents through dialogue or discussion is usually information. It is also what we give to para-professionals and other workers during training. In the context of parent education, mothers receive nutrition and child care information to help improve their child rearing practices. Similarly, communities mobilise for development and better living standards through propaganda, exposure to the media and other communication networks. I also suggested at the beginning that Africans would be motivated to necessary action if they were well-informed about the scale and gravity of the problems of child survival and child development on the continent.

Information, as we know, is the basis of power and control. One would therefore expect that it should be a key element of empowerment, the strategy that is used nowadays by donor agencies to 'make people stronger where once they were weak, placing them in control of their lives and enabling them to make their own choices'.

Can there be empowerment without enlightenment? Africans are not weak. They work very hard to solve their day-to-day problems. What they lack is access to information. Communities need information about disease and germs, pollution and climatic changes, soil erosion and how to build terraces. At another level they need information about their rights as citizens so that they can make demands on their governments. They also need to be exposed to national and international issues and how these affect their lives.

Africans need to be empowered with technical information that will equip them with skills to develop new and appropriate agricultural techniques and policies so that families and communities can be well fed. They also need access to information about more efficient solutions to the problems of child survival and child development – information that already exists in the developed world.

If donor agencies would empower the disadvantaged communities of Africa so that their services and support are no longer needed, then they must commit themselves to giving and sharing information. Are they prepared to do this? To give away information is to relinquish power and control. It means they would lose the position of advantage over recipient peoples, but they would have gained the achievement of their objectives. Africans must learn how to break through information barriers, even as the Japanese have done.

The challenge of the new decade is 'Enlightenment for Empowerment' in the struggle for child survival and child development. Does that sound like education for all? or information for all?

Future priorities and strategies: some suggestions

Creating public awareness

It is important to create public awareness in Africa. This will motivate purposeful action. We need to devote time, effort and resources to campaign and propaganda in order to inform various groups about the issues and problems of child survival and child development in Africa. These groups include: policy makers at national and international levels (Organisation of African Unity, Economic Community of West African States and so on); the general public; and the disadvantaged communities whose children are at risk.

One-day regional or national seminars could be planned for policy makers based on the principle of 'seeing is believing'. That is, the emphasis should be on visits to project sites, interaction and discussion with members of the communities and the children, demonstrations, documentary films followed by discussions, exhibitions and other activities rather than voluminous articles and long prepared speeches. Policy makers, who include politicians, ministers, top administrators and executives, do not place much credibility in the spoken word since they themselves often write documents and resolutions that are never acted upon, and give promises to the people that are never kept. The seminars have to be short because these are busy people. These bureaucrats and legislators should go away from the seminar with a well-prepared, well-illustrated information booklet highlighting urgent problems and attempted solutions, areas for necessary funding and legislation. I suggest that such seminars be held at least once a year nationally, regionally and internationally.

The general public, on the other hand, can be informed through radio programmes, television talk shows, posters, leaflets, information booklets, conferences, seminars and public lectures. Journalists who seem to be good at communicating with the public should be sponsored to visit project sites regularly and report on them so that the public is regularly acquainted with problems and achievements. We should also hold regular press conferences to acquaint journalists with one or two pertinent issues. Favourite pop stars should be encouraged to give concerts to raise funds and to alert the public to the problems of Africa's children. National and local heroes and athletes could organise marathons to publicise the issues.

Members of the disadvantaged communities need to be mobilised to overcome their apathy and to motivate self effort. This can be done through rallies, door to door interviews, church/mosque organisations, women's organisations, village progressive unions, village elders, crafts organisations and others. This group will also need to see in order to believe. Therefore we need to use simple messages, short speeches, posters, illustrated calenders and leaflets, together with demonstrations, drama sketches and documentary films.

Training and production of materials

Usually, the people who have the clearest vision and the skills to solve the problems of child survival and child development are the practitioners, academics, staff of the aid agencies, bureaucrats and so on. These people usually have their offices located several miles away from the communities needing their intervention and are also far removed socially and culturally from the disadvantaged communities. Hence the actual work of day-to-day interaction with children and their families is entrusted to community-based workers

through supervisors working under social development officers employed by local government or through State ministries.

Since the implementation of intervention strategies depends on staff of different levels, skills and interests – which in some cases may not include child welfare and development – it is important that attention be given to training and motivation. Community-based workers, who are members of the project community, should be trained directly by central staff rather than by trainers. Otherwise, by the time the articulated vision at the centre gets to the local level, it has gone through different tiers and all that is left may be a blurred and sometimes confused message.

It is also necessary to obtain and document local knowledge of child care, herbal treatments for childhood diseases, diets, food taboos and beliefs, folk tales, local history, heroes, children's games and so on. This information can be provided by the mothers and fathers of the communities who are recruited to work with project staff as community-based workers. The documentation of local knowledge will provide resource material on which training manuals can be based.

Coordinated early childhood care and development

To what extent are current early childhood programmes meeting the needs of the children and the aspirations of their families? Pre-school programmes need to be combined with home-based care and close monitoring of child growth and development. There should be emphasis on close observation and record keeping on individual children, as well as developing and constantly reviewing the pre-school curriculum so that it reflects all aspects of early child care and development. What are the indicators of adequate growth and development for children of different ages in Africa? How can we celebrate the outstanding achievements of individual children or groups of children? We should encourage the production of toys and educational materials by children themselves, helped by project staff and youths in vocational training programmes.

Vocational training

Youth training and employment programmes which are community-based will arrest the 'brain drain' from villages to the cities. There is a need to incorporate vocational skills into the curricula of primary and secondary schools.

Community enlightenment, parent/adult education

Existing pre-school centres and proposed ones should be converted for multipurpose use so that they can be used at different times of the day for parent education and adult enlightenment classes. Based on the principle that to empower people is to give them information necessary for their survival and development, adult education programmes should go beyond literacy and numeracy to include the following subjects: germs and diseases and how best to treat them; nutritional value of various foods; food hygiene, preparation and preservation; the importance of play and cognitive stimulation; income generating activities; how to obtain access to credit facilities; better farming techniques; ecological disasters and how to prevent them; citizen's rights and responsibilities. This group of people learn best through demonstrations and the visible solution of practical real life problems. Dialogue and discussions also help to clarify concepts and to promote understanding and changes of attitude. There is a need to produce well-illustrated and simple reading materials/books based on the subjects listed above.

Closer monitoring of projects and evaluation

It is necessary to establish a record keeping and reporting system from community level through all the tiers to the central agency. This would include more frequent visits by central staff to project sites and the development of indicators of project success.

Providing basic infrastructure and services

In order to sustain the gains of child survival and child development programmes there need to be improvements in the basic infrastructure and services. Children survive and develop their full potential in an environment and context that makes survival and maximum development possible. The disadvantaged communities in Africa need basic amenities such as safe drinking water, electricity, hospitals, schools, good access roads and the development of local technology to support income generating activities.

Long-term planning

Let us discuss 20 year development plans rather than our usual four or five year projections. We need long-term planning for linkages between pre-school, primary school, and secondary or vocational school. We also need long-term planning for disengagement, transfer of skills and handing over control of projects to the local communities and their national governments.

Cooperation and integration of action

The multi-level, integrated approach requires the cooperation and joint action of several departments, ministries, organisations and agencies, as well as the contributions of consultants from various disciplines and cultural backgrounds. How do we work together without rancour, envy, rivalry and suspicion in order to promote the survival and development of African children? There is a need to recognise and respect 'territories' and areas of specialisation, while at the same time we need to evolve mechanisms for cooperation in planning and joint implementation of programmes. But most important of all, we must include representatives of the target communities as partners together with us on the wheel of progress and sustained action.

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Contributions to this series are welcomed. Suggestions should in the first instance be addressed to: Willem van der Eyken, Head, Studies and Evaluation, Bernard van Leer Foundation, at the address given below.

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The **Bernard van Leer Foundation** is an international, philanthropic and professional institution based in The Netherlands. Created in 1949 for broad humanitarian purposes, the Foundation concentrates its resources on support for the development of community-led and culturally appropriate initiatives that focus on the developmental needs of children from birth to eight years of age. Currently, the Foundation supports some 100 major projects in more than 40 developing and industrialised countries.

As part of its mandate, the Foundation also supports evaluation, training and the dissemination of project experiences to an international audience. It communicates the outcomes of these activities to international agencies, institutions and governments, with the aim of improving practice and influencing policies to benefit children.

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